Introduction to Farm Stress:
Mental Health Needs Among Diverse Farm Populations

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Agenda

• Farming demographics: Who are our U.S. producers?
• Describe farm stress.
• Present contributing factors.
• Mental health needs and suicide rates among farm families.
• Mental health resources for providers, communities, and farm families.
Mountain Plains
Mental Health Technology Transfer Center

Provide free training, resources, and technical assistance to individuals serving persons with mental health disorders, especially those with serious mental illness or a serious emotional disturbance.

Funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

Rural Focus

Address rural barriers around mental healthcare accessibility, availability, and acceptability in Region 8. The Mountain Plains MHTTC will develop and provide training and technical assistance that:

• Reaches students, entry level professionals, and established providers in rural communities.
• Highlights the appropriate use of technologies for the existing rural mental health workforce.
• Covers effective practice in rural communities. Many established models for delivery of behavioral healthcare do not account for the unique challenges presented by rural communities.

https://mhttcnetwork.org/centers/mountain-plains-mhttc/home
Disclosure

This presentation was prepared for the Mountain Plains Mental Health Technology Transfer Center (TTC) Network under a cooperative agreement from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

At the time of this presentation, Elinore F. McCance-Katz, served as SAMHSA Assistant Secretary. The opinions expressed herein are the views of Shawnda Schroeder, Thomasine Heitkamp, and Matt Perdue and do not reflect the official position of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), SAMHSA. No official support or endorsement of DHHS, SAMHSA, for the opinions described in this presentation is intended or should be inferred.

Who are our U.S. Producers?
Farming Populations: 2017 Ag Census

- 2.04 million farms and ranches (down 3.2% from 2012) with roughly 3.4 million farmers.
  - Male: 2.17 million
  - Female: 1.23 million
- 96% of farms and ranches are family owned.
- 75.4% of farms have internet access.
- Average age: 57.5 (continual increase since 1980).

Farming Populations: 2017 Ag Census

- One in four producers is a beginning farmer with 10 or fewer years of experience.
- 56% of all farms have at least one female decision maker.
- Percent of producers where farming is the primary occupation is highest in the Midwest.
- NEED to recognize regional differences in order to develop resources and provide care.

Source: USDA National Agricultural Statistics Services, ESRI:
nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2017/Online_Resources/Ag_Census_Web_Maps/index.php
Average Age of Producers, 2017

% of Producers 65 or Older, 2017
Female Producers, 2017

Source: USDA National Agricultural Statistics Services, ESRI: nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus2017/Online_Resources/Ag_Census_Web_Maps/index.php

White Producers, 2017

Source: USDA National Agricultural Statistics Services, ESRI: nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus2017/Online_Resources/Ag_Census_Web_Maps/index.php
Understanding Farm Stress

Defining “Farm Stress”

- Majority of resources conceptualize as financial (it is not, though finance is a contributing factor).
- Farm stress can be experienced by the farmer/producer, agricultural workers, and farm families.
- Farm stress is the stress experienced by farmers and their families as a result of the unique agricultural work environment.
Contributing Factors

- Uncertainty and lack of control over outside forces:
  - Weather and natural disasters.
  - Tariffs and commodity pricing.
- Financial pressure among owners.
  - Debt load, equipment repairs or upgrades, product value.
- Extreme outdoor work conditions.
- Fatigue or excessive workload.
- Stigma around help-seeking, and lack of mental health resources.

Access to Relevant Care

- Lack of behavioral health workforce in rural areas.
- Lack of preparation for primary care providers on the topics of:
  - Depression vs. toxic reaction to farm chemicals.
  - Agricultural medicine (currently six textbooks).
  - Agricultural behavioral health (no textbooks).
Not all farm stress is the same.

- Farmers/owners experience variable stress compared to agricultural workers or a seasonal workforce.
- One region is facing drought while other regions experience flooding.
- The daily stress of milk production or the seasonal stress of crop management or calving.
Physical Symptoms of Farm Stress

- Muscles are tighter or tense.
- Aching head.
- Upset stomach.
- Shortness of breath.
- Excessively low energy or fatigue.
- High blood pressure.
- Increased heart rate.
- Poor sleep patterns.
- Increase in illness.
- Ulcers.

Behavioral and Emotional Symptoms

- Low self-esteem.
- Memory loss.
- Lack of concentration.
- Inability to make decisions.
- Sadness, depression, anger, bitterness.
- Loss of spirit and/or humor.
- Acting out.
- Withdrawal from friends and family.
- Increased irritability.
- Anxiety.
- Drastic change in eating habits.
- Using substances or increasing use (to include tobacco or alcohol).
- Difficulty controlling emotions.
- Impatient.
Signs of Clinical Depression

If these symptoms last for longer than two weeks, interfere with your work, or if feeling suicidal seek help.

- Persistent sad, anxious or “empty” mood.
- Feelings of hopelessness, pessimism.
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, helplessness.
- Loss of interest or pleasure in hobbies and activities.
- Decreased energy, fatigue, being “slowed down”.
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering, making decisions.
- Difficulty sleeping, early-morning awakening or oversleeping.
- Appetite and/or weight changes.
- Thoughts of death or suicide, suicide attempts.
- Restlessness, irritability.
- Persistent physical symptoms.


Two Question Self-Assessment

If yes to either of these questions, consider talking to your health care provider about future assessment

- During the past two weeks, have you often been bothered by feeling down, depressed, or hopeless?
- During the past two weeks, have you often been bothered by little interest or pleasure in doing things?
Mental Health Screening Tools

Taking a mental health screening is one of the quickest and easiest ways to determine whether you are experiencing symptoms of a mental health condition. Mental health conditions, such as depression or anxiety, are real, common and treatable. And recovery is possible.

- Depression Test
- Anxiety Test
- Psychosis Test
- Bipolar Test
- Eating Disorder Test
- PTSD Test
- Parent Test
- Youth Test
- Addiction Test

Additional self-assessment tools available through Mental Health America
https://screening.mhanational.org/screening-tools

Farm Stress Suicides

Media reported suicide risk for farmers higher than any other occupation based on CDC report:

Data were retracted and revised.

The Centers of Disease Control and Prevention produced the 2016 study that showed the “farming, fishing and forestry” occupational group suffered a higher rate of suicide than any other occupation. CBS News covered the study when it came out (and in a story this week), as did many other media outlets, including NPR, The New York Post, The Guardian and Mother Jones.

But this week, the CDC retracted the study, issuing a notice about errors it said were found in the initial data. Among the errors, an agency spokesperson said, was misclassifying farmers into the wrong occupation group, which resulted in the suicide rate for “farming, fishing and forestry” being overstated and the rate for other occupations being understated.
Notes about the Revised CDC Data

- Only provides a snapshot for the years 2012 and 2015.
- Limited to 17 states that participated in the National Violent Death Reporting System.
- Those 17 states represent about ¼ of our nation’s farms.
- The “Triple-F” major occupational group (farming, fishing and forestry) includes agricultural workers but doesn’t include self-employed farmers and ranchers or agricultural managers.
- Farmers and ranchers are included in the “Management” major group, along with CEOs, elementary principals, and other management.

Updated CDC Report

Today’s report includes separate analysis of selected agriculture-related detailed groups:

- For males in the Farmers, Ranchers, and Other Occupational Managers category (a sub-group of the Management major group), the corrected 2012 suicide rate was 44.9 per 100,000 civilian noninstitutionalized working persons and the 2015 suicide rate was 32.2.
- For males in the Agricultural Workers category (a sub-group of the Farming, Fishing, and Forestry major group), the corrected 2012 suicide rate was 20.4 per 100,000 civilian noninstitutionalized working persons and the 2015 suicide rate was 17.3.

https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2018/p1115-Suicide-american-workers.html
Farm Suicide Rates Still High

- No longer number one occupation for suicide. All males 2015, top three were:
  - Construction and extraction,
  - Arts, design, entertainment, sports, and media, and
  - Installation, maintenance, and repair.
- No increase in suicide rate among farmers from 2012 to 2015.
- Suicide rate STILL much higher for farmers than for all working aged adults.

From 2000 to 2015, the U.S. suicide rate among working aged (16–64 years) adults increased 34% from 12.9 per 100,000 population to 17.3.

- For males in the Farmers, Ranchers, and Other Occupational Managers category the 2012 suicide rate was 44.9 per 100,000 civilian working persons compared to 32.2 in 2015.
- For males in the Ag. Worker category (a sub-group of the “Triple F” major group), the 2012 suicide rate was 20.4 per 100,000 working persons compared to 17.3 in 2015.

Warning Signs: Suicide

- Talk of suicide and history of suicide in family.
- Increase use of drugs and alcohol.
- Giving away possessions.
- Obtaining firearms.
- Withdrawal from family.
- Aggressive and disruptive behavior.
- Stop taking medications.
- Preoccupation with death.

Public Response to Farm Stress and Available Resources
Resources

- Suicide hotline: 1-800-273-TALK or 1-800-SUICIDE
  - suicidepreventionlifeline.org
- Avera farm stress hotline: 1-800-691-4336
- FarmAid: 1-800-FARM-AID
- National Farmers Union: nfu.org
- National Farmers Union: Farm Crisis Center: farmcrisis.nfu.org
- Rural Advancement Foundation International: rafiusa.org
- AgriSafe Network: www.agrisafe.org

Resources: Extension Offices

State and County Extension Offices add behavioral health resources and products on farm and family stress.

- Provide warning signs of stress or risk of suicide.
- Tips for managing stress.
- Financial planning tools.
- Tips for families and signs of family stress.
- Hotlines or chat resources.
- Videos of coping, managing, and warning signs.

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SDSU Extension Supports Farmers & Ranchers During Stressful Time

September 12, 2019

Held April 15, 2019 in Aberdeen, Sioux Falls, Pierre and Rapid City, the two workshops are Communicating with Farmers Under Stress, for business professionals and service providers; and Weathering the Storm in Agriculture: How to Cultivate a Productive Mindset, for farm and ranch families.

Ask an Expert – Five Tips for Busting Stress

Stress – we all have it, whether it’s at work, home or places in between. There are times when we feel especially stressed due to a bad interaction or everyday hassles like traffic. No one’s life is completely stress-free, but regular negative stress can keep us from feeling and performing at our best; therefore, it’s important that we learn how to manage it.

There are activities we can incorporate into our daily lives to manage or prevent a build-up of negative stress. These include things such as regular physical activity, getting enough sleep, meditation, etc. However, there are times when we need in-the-moment stress stoppers. Consider these five ideas:

1. Count to 10 before you react. Even a short pause can help you think clearly.
2. Leave the situation and go for a walk. A change of scenery can be beneficial in thinking the situation through.
3. Break down big problems into smaller parts, then you can take it one step at a time.
4. Turn on relaxing music or an inspirational podcast.
5. Take a few slow, deep breaths. To do this, try the breathe-deep challenge. This challenge invites you to slow down and breathe deeply any time you need a moment to diffuse a stressful situation.

Count to 4 as you breathe in. Hold for 4 counts. Breathe out for 4 counts. Repeat four or more times, or until you feel your body unclench a bit. Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. Let your body expand. Relax your body as you breathe.

By: Emma Parkhurst, Utah State University Extension professional practice assistant professor. 435-919-1334, emparkhurst@usu.edu

https://extension.usu.edu/news_sections/home_family_and_food/five-tips-for-busting-stress

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Farm and Ranch Family Stress and Depression: A Checklist and Guide for Making Referrals

A Checklist and Guide for Making Referrals
By: Robert L. French, Human Development & Family Studies
Colorado State University

and

Roger T. Williams, Professional Development & Applied Studies
University of Wisconsin-Madison

SIGNS OF FARM AND RANCH STRESS

The last few years have been difficult for farm and ranch families. Many are experiencing financial and emotional stress as a result. There are several signs or symptoms when a farm family may be in need of help. These are signs that can be observed by friends, extended family members, neighbors, milk haulers, veterinarians, clergy persons, school personnel or health and human service workers. These signs include:

Coping with rural stress

Weathering difficult times

Extension's rural stress task force applies programming and expertise from across Extension to help families and small towns respond to current economic, environmental and sociological challenges that overwhelmingly affect rural Minnesota and farming communities. The team works with state agencies and agricultural organizations as well as colleagues throughout the University.

Many Extension faculty and staff live and work in rural Minnesota. They respond daily...

https://extension.umn.edu/rural-stress

You may be interested in

Home and financial management
Managing a farm
Mental health and wellbeing

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MSU Extension
Managing Farm Stress

Taking care of crops and animals is hard on farmers and agribusiness professionals. Caring for your own health and well-being in this high-stress profession is often overlooked but is just as critical as caring for your farm business.

Need help now? Ask an Expert

Responding to Farmers in Need
Resilient Farms: Financial and Management Guidance
Resilient Minds: Managing Stress on the Farm
Delayed Planting and Harvest Impact Resources

https://www.canr.msu.edu/managing_farm_stress/
The farmer mental health crisis: Understanding a vulnerable population

A one-hour webinar from APA and Farm Aid explains the mental health crisis among U.S. farmers and how psychologists can help. Experts will talk about farmers' unique stressors and ways to connect with the farming community.

By APA Member Services  August 26, 2010

https://www.apa.org/members/content/farmer-mental-health

What are some mental health concerns for farmers and ranchers and their families?

In addition to physical injuries, farmers are also at risk of behavioral and mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, substance use, and death by suicide. Due to environmental, financial, and social factors, there are a number of stressors inherent in farming and farm ownership.

In this brief video, experts from national farm organizations discuss the challenges facing today’s farmers, warning signs of suicide, and how communities can help farmers and their families.

Preventing Farmer Suicide: Collaborating...

According to a 2014 study of farmers in Eastern North Carolina, the top three farm-related stress factors were:

- The weather
- Concern over the future of the farm
- Outsiders not understanding the nature of farming

https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/topics/agricultural-health-and-safety/mental-health
Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network

Funded through the USDA, the purpose of FRSAN is to establish a network that connects individuals who are engaged in farming, ranching, and other agriculture-related occupations to stress assistance programs. The establishment of a network that assists farmers and ranchers in time of stress can offer a conduit to improving behavioral health awareness, literacy, and outcomes for agricultural producers, workers and their families.


TYPES OF PROJECTS

The FRSAN program will accept applications for Regional Networks.

The long-term goal of the FRSAN projects is to establish a Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network that provides stress assistance programs to individuals who are engaged in farming, ranching, and other agriculture-related occupations on a regional basis. Network members must initiate, expand, or sustain programs that provide professional agricultural behavioral health counseling and referral for other forms of assistance as necessary through the following:

1. Farm telephone helplines and websites;
2. Training including training programs and workshops;
3. Support groups; and
4. Outreach services and activities, including the dissemination of information and materials.
### Gaps and Unmet Needs

- Suicide hotlines are not farm-specific.
- Lack of behavioral health providers.
- Stigma and low mental health literacy.
- Resources are not meeting farmers where they are at.
- Primary care and mental health providers are not all prepared or trained to meet specific mental health needs of farm producers and their families.
- Existing resources are hard to find and muddied in resources for financial stress and assistance.

Moving Forward

- Fund local solutions and provide help where they are.
- Prepare community members and families to identify signs of farm stress, and offer coping strategies and referral resources.
- Develop farm population specific resources (ex. suicide hotlines or chats specifically for farm populations).
- Work with farmers regionally to identify primary needs, and how best to share resources.
- Train counselors on farm stress.
- Develop local support groups.

Moving Forward

- Provide social emotional supports for family members.
- On the spot access to assistance (weekends and evenings).
- Support development of integrated care approaches.
- Host community events.
- Training for financial advisors/bankers who work with farm communities.
- Provide education on talk radio and other media that farmers listen to.
- Talk openly about stigma.
- Engage faith-based communities.
Upcoming Trainings from Mountain Plains MHTTC

- *Economics of Farm Stress*, December 9, 12:00 pm – 1:00 pm CT
- *Hands on Tools and Strategies to Assist Providers Working with Farmers*, December 16
- *Farm Stress and Compassion Fatigue*, Early 2020, TBD
- *Farm Families Mental Health: Faith Based Responses*, Early 2020, TBD

Subscribe to our e-mail list to be notified of future trainings and resources: https://mhttcnetwork.org/centers/mountain-plains-mhttc/subscribe

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